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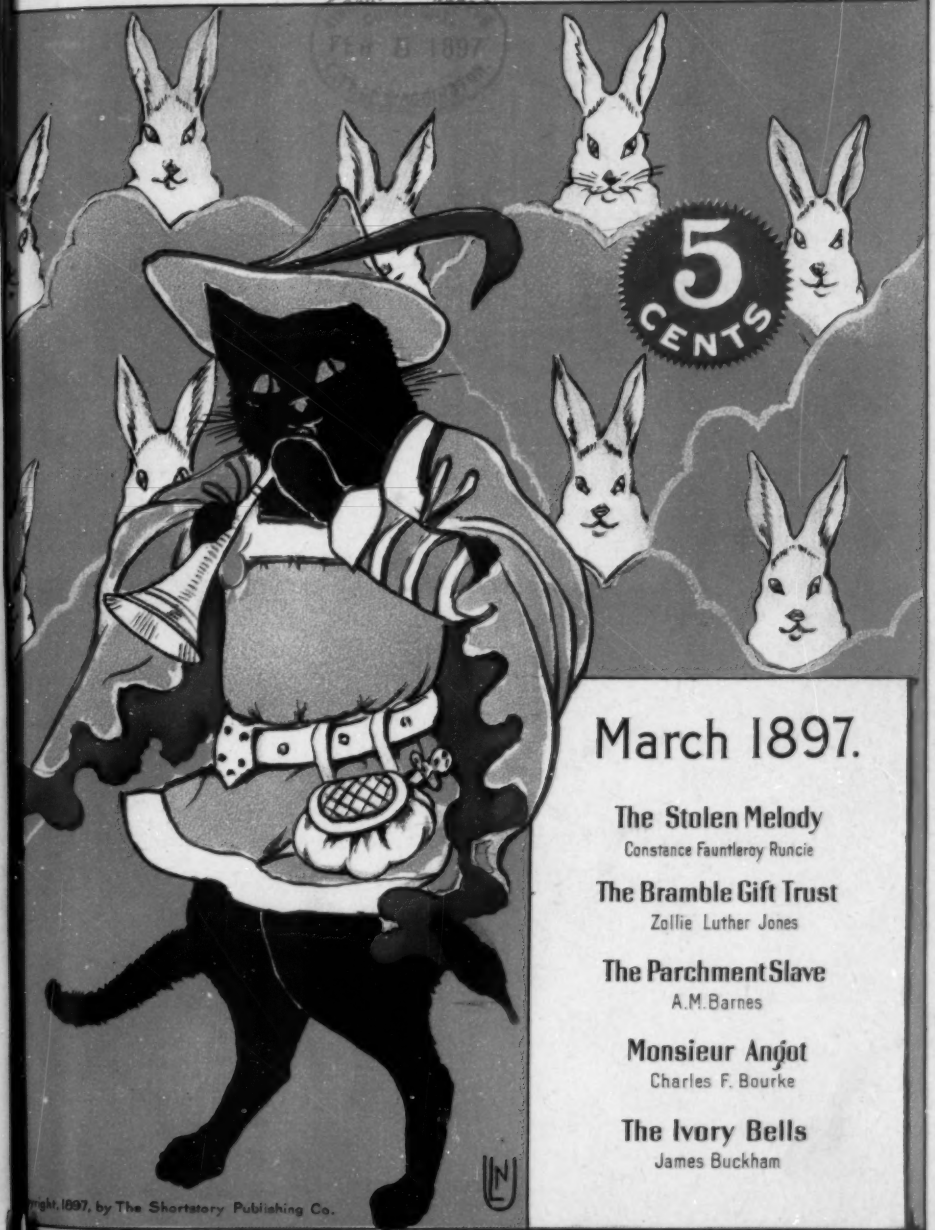

March 1897.

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The Stolen Melody.

BY CONSTANCE FAUNTLEROY RUNCIE.

"DO you attend Madam Federer's reception this evening?" asked the Professor, carelessly, as he prepared to depart.

"Yes, I think we are to go," answered Elizabeth, rising from the piano.

"I understand Paul Jansen, the Swedish composer, is to be there."

It did not escape the Professor's swift observation that a wave of color swept over the sensitive face of his pupil at the mention of this name.

"He is here, I presume," continued the Maestro, "to enter the list of competitors for the prize to be awarded by the Royal Academy next week. It is an honor worth striving after, Miss Elizabeth, although I am told that in your country the musical pulse beats much more slowly than with us."

The young American girl remained silent. She was thinking over the attributes required to study music successfully in Germany under some of these absolutely perfect masters. Great courage, nerves of iron, insensibility to biting sarcasm, a strong back, intense ambition, intense love for your work, intense endurance, unrelaxed application, hours and years of study, the uplift-

ing fury of a great passion, and the patience of Job — these are a few of the many qualifications. Should you live through the ordeal, you can return to this country and print upon your card, "Pupil of the great Maestro So and So"; and the initiated understand that nature has fitted you to meet any strain upon the nervous system that can be imagined. You certainly have been tried and need never be found wanting under any emergency.

Who would think that in Elizabeth Ainslee's slight and girlish figure could be bound up such heroism?

Yet she was laboring under more than ordinary difficulties.

Professor Zeno was said to be the finest teacher of the day. His charges were enormous, they ruined you; but others were eagerly waiting to take your place, should you drop away. It was considered a great distinction to be received as his pupil, and Mrs. Ainslee congratulated herself upon having secured his services for her daughter. More than one mother envied her.

Yet Elizabeth felt a secret dislike and aversion to this man, which was wholly unaccountable. Indeed, the strain of this secret dread often left her, at the close of her lesson, in a state of nervous exhaustion that seriously hindered her studies.

Then, again, when the mood was upon him, he would move her to such rapture by his rendering of her beloved old masters that every atom in her thrilled responsive, not only to the melodies, but also their corresponding forces. To her had been granted that rare artistic insight into the real poetry of sound that inspired the marvelous utterance of Pythagoras: "When the Almighty formed the universe, it was by music." To her, also, was known that discovery of modern science which confirms the poetic truth of the old philosopher's utterance, — the discovery that through all nature the sounding of the octave causes the corresponding figure of the circle to appear.

Thus, when Elizabeth's soul was uplifted by some immortal melody of a beloved master, it was as though she shared in the Biblical vision of the creation and listened to those world harmonies born "when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy."

Into such realms as these the girl's thoughts had soared this morning when her Master, just before departing, had seated him-

self at the piano, and begun one of Beethoven's masterly sonatas. Sunk in the depths of an armchair, Elizabeth listened in almost painful rapture, and when, with the final chord, he turned and directed a penetrating glance toward her, she was unable to repress a shudder.

Presently, with a steady, powerful gaze, he fixed his eyes upon her own. Vainly she endeavored to evade this look; for a moment her heart throbbed furiously; then it stood still as if turned into stone, and she felt herself drifting helplessly into unconsciousness. Her alarmed pride availed nothing, her efforts to rise were futile; those compelling eyes were still powerfully concentrated upon hers, and still scintillated that baleful light which seemed to penetrate her soul.

Nearer and nearer he came, taking her hands in his. Elizabeth had no power to withdraw them; all her will force had ebbed from her. In a few seconds she was in a deep sleep. Then the Professor, in a low, penetrating voice addressed her: —

"Yes," he said, "you will go this evening to Madam Federer's; you will meet Paul Jansen. But first tell me if you know him."

"I know him."

"You met him where?"

"In Copenhagen."

"When?"

"Last summer."

"You have heard him play?"

"Often."

"Listen, this is what you must do"; and slowly and distinctly, with the same voice of authority, he continued: —

"You must ask him to play his last Fantasie, which has never yet been heard in public. He is saving it for the prize contest at the Royal Academy. He will play it for you. Memorize it — do not miss one note, one phrase; and to-morrow morning at ten I will be here — you will then play it for me. But — listen — you must forget it except when I ask for it.

"And now finish your sleep; it is eleven o'clock — awake in thirty minutes." Here he dropped her hands, made a pass or two, and withdrew, leaving his pupil in her death-like trance.

Precisely at half past eleven Elizabeth awoke, remembering

nothing beyond listening to the last strains of Beethoven's Sonata Appassionata.

"He plays wonderfully," she murmured. "Why do I dislike him so?"

And then the remembrance of the evening's concert, and of the young Swedish composer whom she was again to meet there, sent her thoughts into pleasanter channels.

By the time that she reached Madam Federer's she had forgotten everything, save a happiness that rendered her delicate beauty fairly radiant. Seated with her mother in a retired corner of the drawing-room, the young American dominated the gathering from the moment of her appearance. And many envious eyes were turned upon her when the lion of the evening, Paul Jansen, hastened upon his entrance to greet her, evidently as an old friend.

Tall, blond haired, of noble presence, he certainly was most attractive, this young Swedish composer, and made one happy simply because he was himself surcharged with happiness. An irresistible joyousness pervaded his manner, drawing all to him. His voice was ringing with animation; his quick intelligence commanded those around him. Even Herr Camille, the famous and much-feared art critic, smiled, and asked graciously: —

"What are you to submit before the Academy to-morrow evening, Jansen? I know that you intend to honor us by competing for the prize."

"Yes, yes," stormed a chorus of voices, "do, dear Herr Jansen, do give us some idea of your motif. A phrase. No? A single bar, then."

To all their entreaties, however, Jansen returned a courteous negative, protesting that he wished them to hear his composition for the first time on the following evening. In the end he silenced them only by dashing into one of their own national airs, delighting them with the feeling and brilliancy of his execution.

It was in the buzz of conversation following upon this performance that Jansen managed to secure a few quiet moments with Elizabeth in a remote corner of the library. Here he put her through an eager catechism as to her travels and studies, everything, in short, that had made up her life since the preceding

summer, bringing up finally to the question, "And how goes the music, Miss Ainslee? who is your master?"

"Zeno."

"Zeno!" The sparkling blue eyes of the young Swede suddenly clouded. "Zeno," he repeated. "You startle me. It is the name of the only man I can ever remember to have offended. He makes no secret of his enmity to me."

"Your enemy! Oh, then I can understand —"

"Understand why I hate him," it had been on the girl's lips to say, but she stopped short, flushing at what would have been an awkward pause had not Mrs. Ainslee just then appeared in search of her daughter. In her train followed several of the guests, so intent upon introductions to Jansen and the beautiful young American that soon the trio were swept apart. Not, however, before Mrs. Ainslee had asked the young composer to take a cup of bouillon with herself and Elizabeth after the concert; — "To talk over the approaching contest, and to give your opinion on Elizabeth's playing," Mrs. Ainslee had said by way of accounting for the unceremonious invitation. But that the meeting meant far more to Jansen and Elizabeth was evident from the radiant faces of both when, soon after ten, Mrs. Ainslee ushered the young musician into her pretty little apartment.

Unacknowledged even by themselves, love was standing perilously near this man and maiden, his shining wings hiding a roguish smile. When he moved, some of the glittering light fell from these wings on Elizabeth's waving brown hair, or was reflected in Paul's blue eyes.

Gathered around Mrs. Ainslee's tea-table, they sipped nectar and ambrosia. The mother called it bouillon and said it was "too salty," but she was mistaken. Sometimes one sups with the gods.

Then Elizabeth played, and played well, her slender, girlish figure looking inexpressibly poetic in the subdued light. As she finished a chaste little bit, curiously original, —

"What is that?" inquired Herr Jansen, "I seem not to know it." Then, as Elizabeth only smiled, "It is your own," he cried, "and it is admirable," — grasping her hand warmly in his.

Something in Mrs. Ainslee's face may have indicated surprise at the young composer's fervency. At any rate, a few moments

later he rose and would have made his adieux, had not Elizabeth entreated, with unwonted fire: —

"Surely, before you go, Herr Jansen, you will at least let us hear one piece of your own."

Then, as she waited for his reply, she distinctly heard a low, authoritative voice pronounce these words: —

"You must ask him to play his last Fantasie, which has never yet been heard in public. He is saving it for the prize contest which is to come off to-morrow night at the Royal Academy. He will play it for you. Memorize it; do not miss one note, one phrase; and to-morrow morning at ten I will be here."

The next moment, as in a dream, she found herself begging for a hearing of Jansen's new composition, and, still as in a dream, she saw the young composer seat himself at the instrument and begin the Fantasie which was destined in its day to turn the heads of all the musical world.

"He will play it for you, you will memorize every note of it," echoed faintly in her ear, as she listened to that ever-recurring, distant melody which sounded farther and farther away, like music heard in sleep.

Then she knew no more until she awoke, confused and embarrassed, to find Herr Jansen somewhat constrainedly taking his leave amid Mrs. Ainslee's apologies for her daughter's remissness.

"What can he think of me. How can it have happened that I should sleep while he poured out his soul to me?" she sobbed, when she had received her mother's kiss and crept into bed. And in spite of her weariness Elizabeth lay awake far into the morning, living over the events of the evening, and wondering if the young composer would ever forgive her glaring lack of appreciation.

So thoroughly was her mind possessed by thoughts like these that she had absolutely forgotten Professor Zeno when on the next morning, punctually at ten, her Master was announced. At the sound of his name a tremor passed over the girl, and a confused apprehension of some undefined evil surged through her brain. Nor did this feeling disappear when Zeno recounted a startling piece of news — namely, that the prize contest was not to take place that evening, but had been postponed for a week, that its leader, the great Lander, might obey the king's summons to the

capital city, and consult with his majesty regarding an opera to be given on the queen's birthday.

Indeed, to all this his listener made no reply. Sinking listlessly into the nearest chair, she silently acceded to his suggestion that, as she was evidently too fatigued for a lesson, he would play to her — a Presto in F, by Moschelles.

No sooner, however, had she settled herself than he left the instrument, and silently approaching her once more, transfixed her with that steady soul-searching glance that deprived her of all power of volition. Again those malignant eyes scintillated that dangerous light. Taking her unresisting hands in his, her Master commanded, in a tone of quiet authority: "You will now seat yourself at the piano and play for me, without missing a note, Herr Jansen's prize composition, which your psychic memory retains exactly as you heard it last night."

Very slowly, like one walking in her sleep, Elizabeth rose and approached the instrument, where, with all her skill, and knowledge, and artistic fire, she played through the Fantasie just as she had heard it performed by Herr Jansen the night before.

Zeno listened with intense concentration of thought. Again and again sounded that ever-recurrent, wonderful melody, woven like one of Bach's fugues through every conceivable form and key. It was like the poet Wergeland's "Swallow," of which he says: —

"Then I lifted up my soul and saw the swallow sinking, floating softly through the milk-white clouds on high. How she drifted through the blue — I scarce could follow her sungilded body, though the sun lay in a dark cloud-hollow.

"How she sprang and turned in flashing, as if weaving in midair with her wing points through and through,

A strange web of gold and blue,
While the balsam drops afar
On her beak glittered like a double star."

Very seldom is born a truly symmetrical melody, one which contains life and personality, of which artists will say: —

"It has a right to live — it is immortal."

Such a one was this composition of Jansen's, and recognized at once as such by Zeno. He realized, too, that this would unques-

tionably carry off the coveted prize, and crown the author with fame; and it was with a smile of absolute triumph that he drew out his notebook and, with his marvelous dexterity, wrote down the music while Elizabeth played.

The composition finished, he led his pupil back to her chair, and with a few passes brought her out of her trance. Then naming her evident fatigue as an excuse for his immediate departure, he withdrew, leaving her with no other recollection of the morning than one of annoyance that she had again succumbed to sleep during the performance of a masterpiece.

. . . . . .

It was the evening of the long-expected competition.

Owing to the absence of Lander, detained to drill the imperial orchestra, three weeks instead of one had elapsed since the date first set for the contest, and to-night the vast and brilliant audience that crowded the Royal Academy seemed fairly to scintillate surpressed excitement and enthusiasm.

Old General Eitle, blazing with orders; the much beloved Princess Sophie; a famous literary light from Paris; even royalty itself — all had signified approval by their presence, while, from orchestra to topmost gallery, the house showed unbroken lines of eager, animated people in gala dress, assembled to witness the contest between their favorite composers. Already ten of the twelve competing numbers had been rendered, all of them marked by such beauty of theme and brilliancy of execution as had kept the audience in a ferment of applause. Joyful anticipation, however, had centered about the compositions of Professor Zeno and Paul Jansen; and the fact that the works of these two favorite composers had been reserved for the end of the program had stretched expectancy to an almost painful tension.

On the right of the balcony, with her mother, sat Elizabeth, her bared brown head bent a little forward, her fingers clenched in an almost uncontrollable excitement. Nor to Elizabeth did that night mean simply an interesting musical contest. Though only three weeks had elapsed since the evening of the concert, time had been reckoned for her by heart beats, and not by arbitrary days and moments. For in those three weeks had dawned her life's romance. At her earnest entreaty Professor Zeno had been

dismissed, and the girl had become, first, Paul Jansen's pupil, and then, with her mother's consent, his promised wife. Only the evening before she had bade him Godspeed during the approaching contest as confidently, yet as solemnly, as would a soldier's sweetheart when girding on the sword of her hero. To-night, when she saw him take his place beside Professor Zeno, in the seats reserved at the front for the artists, it was as though she watched him go forth to battle with mighty hosts.

Amid a solemn hush, Lander, wearing on a blue ribbon above his heart the new decoration bestowed by his king, takes his place on the platform. At last Professor Zeno's long anticipated composition is to be given to the world. With a peculiar, impatient, ominous "tat — tat!" the great leader lifts his bâton, its flaming jewels scintillating rapid lines of fire.

The moment is indescribable. What hangs suspended in the trembling air? A mighty symphony is floating, concealed as yet. See it start into shape. Could you actually behold it, it is glowing with color born of light and sound. But of what shall that tone-picture be built? — vibrations, corresponding in color and form — music building up an invisible structure? Its storm is all around you — watch with all your senses. Out of the air it descends, this marvelous rush of sound; you are enveloped, and all else is for the time forgotten.

But now Elizabeth starts violently. As in a dream, she sees her old Master mount the platform and begin to play. Where has she heard that melody? What is stealing over her? By degrees several heads turn to gaze curiously at the lovely American girl, who sits with her brown eyes fixed in a wide stare, as though she saw something invisible to those around her. The next moment, however, she recovers herself and leans breathlessly forward, when a sudden disturbance bursts upon the audience like a whirlwind.

A most unheard-of outrage has been perpetrated. The young composer, Paul Jansen, has dashed upon the platform, and, hurling himself upon Professor Zeno, has dragged him from the instrument with the force of a madman. Straightway, amid angry cries of "Shame!" and "Order!" mingled with groans and hisses, Jansen is seized by a group of excited musicians, while Professor Zeno stands quietly by, an inscrutable smile on his scornful lips.

Excitement sweeps like a prairie fire through the entire assembly. Men are angrily gesticulating, women weeping, the blaze of emotion has reached even the box where royalty is seated, when Paul wrenches himself free from the hands that would restrain him.

"Thief, thief," he stammers, then in a louder voice begins:—

"Gentlemen, this man has stolen my melody. He—"

But here his words are drowned by a storm of hoarse protests and threatening exclamations.

At this point, when excitement has reached the pitch where it seems that personal harm may be inflicted on the young Swede by the angry musicians, Lander interferes. Advancing to the front of the platform, he lifts his bâton with that well-known silence-compelling air of authority and sternly calls upon the perpetrator of this outrage for an explanation.

With eyes and nerves strained to the utmost, Elizabeth sees Jansen, his natural dignity and self-control now restored, step forward and bow his thanks to the great leader.

Then in an unshaken voice, and pointing steadily to the figure of Zeno, the young Swede repeats his charge.

"This man," he says firmly, "has stolen my melody. The composition he has played as his is my own original property. Let him dare deny it!"

But his words seem to fall on deaf ears. Not only is Zeno smiling disdainfully, the face of Lander reflects incredulity. Had not Zeno shown him, on his arrival, the manuscript of this very composition, and had not the leader recognized it even then as the work which would bear off the laurels of the evening? more, would bring the artistic world to its composer's feet?

In a voice whose coldness indicates his convictions, he asks, turning to Jansen:—

"Do you know Professor Zeno?" And when the young composer returns a negative answer he continues:

"Then how should he know anything of your work? Have you played it for others? Has any one heard it?"

"No, no one—yet—"

But here Jansen suddenly stops short, his already pale face grows livid, he staggers back as though shot to the heart, his eyes staring out into the aisle. There, advancing, all unconscious of

the curious eyes of the audience, unmindful even of the half-distraught mother, who has sunk back, half fainting, into her seat in the balcony, a pale, wide-eyed girl makes her way to the very platform. It is Elizabeth, with words of entreaty on her lips! Upon her, however, Jansen looks only with horror. For was it not she, his betrothed, was it not she in whom alone he had placed the confidence that had betrayed him?

Very slowly, and with solemn impressiveness, he stretches forth his right hand in a gesture of dismissal.

It is in vain that the girl sobs out incoherent pleas for a hearing. His averted face, his motionless hand, carry even to the breathless audience the force of repudiation. All who have escaped the contagion of the previous excitement are now frozen in their places. Even Elizabeth stands for an instant as if paralyzed by the shock of her lover's suspicion. Then, with a firm, proud air, she turns and surveys undauntedly the assembled artists.

Again a wave of excitement shivers through the audience. In that look the eyes of the girl have met those of her former master; they turn suddenly fixed and staring; her head inclines forward as though she were listening to a far-away voice which dominates her will. In vain the Professor endeavors to undo his work; he is forced to see her once more fall into a somnambulic trance, in which she hears again that far-off whisper: —

"You will memorize it; you will play it for me."

Slowly mounting the platform, she approaches, unhindered, the grand piano and seats herself. Again a great hush falls over the audience; they watch Elizabeth with breathless awe. Dressed all in pure white, her lovely arms bare, a wreath of snowdrops resting on her brown hair, this slender young girl dominates the entire assembly like some visitant from another world.

Paul, meantime, stands absolutely speechless; for now she has begun to play, and never has a woman been heard to play so magnificently, with a brilliancy and fire far beyond that of any of the competing artists. And — crowning wonder — the music that she plays is the same overmastering melody that both the Swedish composer and Professor Zeno have claimed, each as his own composition. On and on she plays, with a rapturous swing

and verve absolutely intoxicating, until her hearers can no longer be restrained. Their enthusiasm reaches a climax in a wild rush of applause, ringing again and again through the hall.

They go wild; women weep and wave their handkerchiefs; jewels and flowers are torn from the bosoms even of the occupants of the royal box, and flung, amid thundering bravos, at the girl's feet.

But Elizabeth, deaf apparently to all their demonstrations, having finished her performance, rises and slowly walks to the front of the stage. There, like a beautiful marble statue, she stands motionless, her hands clasped over her heart.

Then Lander is seen springing to her side, carrying aloft a wreath of laurel which some one has forwarded to his hand. With fiery animation he crowns her as she stands, while the audience gives voice to its delight and admiration in applause that bids fair to rend the rafters.

In the midst of this unparalleled demonstration the eyes of the young composer, falling on his enemy, chance to intercept the malignant glance that Professor Zeno is darting upon his former pupil.

In that instant Paul recalls long-forgotten memories of Professor Zeno's boasts of superhuman power over the human will, and like lightning is flashed through his mind a revelation of the occult means by which his melody was stolen, and the awful injustice of his attitude toward Elizabeth. Then, as unmindful as she of the gaping assembly, he rushes forward and prostrates himself before her, beseeching her forgiveness.

But Elizabeth neither hears nor sees him. Gently she sinks, so gently that she seems almost to float, into his outstretched arms. The sentiment-loving Teutons are thrown into ecstasy by this lovely scene. It is then that Paul, still supporting in his arms the inanimate figure of the girl, calls the artists to his side, and in a few convincing sentences discloses the method by which he has been betrayed. Then gesturing toward Zeno, he concludes, in a voice that penetrates to the topmost gallery: —

"It is this man, who, by compelling his pupil to play to him my composition, memorized by her during a mesmeric trance, has stolen my melody. To-night she has fallen again under his evil influence. Let him be compelled to restore her to herself."

During this speech several pairs of strong arms are forcing Zeno to the front. There is a menace in the air that is more compelling then spoken threats. Unwillingly, yet not without a certain exhilaration, the musician is forced to give an exhibition of his hypnotic powers. A few passes from his fingers, and Elizabeth opens her eyes, to find herself in her lover's arms, with a thousand curious and sympathetic eyes turned upon her.

As she rises, confused and embarrassed, asking wonderingly where she is and what has happened, Lander, in response to the whispered suggestion of Jansen, turns to her.

"*Bitte*, Fraulein," he says kindly, "you have just favored us with a magnificent rendering of the work which we are led to believe is the composition of Herr Jansen. Will you be kind enough to repeat it for us, as it is also claimed by Professor Zeno? You alone can solve this mystery."

"I play Herr Jansen's music? I do not understand. I never struck a note of it."

Under cover of the babble of confused utterances that follows, Professor Zeno stealthily withdraws, while Paul turns to Elizabeth with a whispered appeal which sends the blood to her face. But before her voice can confirm the forgiveness in her eyes, Lander has quieted the storm of voices by demanding: —

"Will Herr Jansen honor us by producing his own work?" adding, as the young composer bows his assent: —

"I beg that the audience will be seated and compose themselves. Let the orchestra resume their places."

It is the final test. For a moment the vast audience holds its breath as one man, while, for the third time this evening, it awaits the playing of the disputed masterpiece. Almost it seems impossible that any musician, even the composer himself, can rival the last rendering of that wonderful melody.

But from the first note any such doubts are dissipated. Jansen is more than justified, he fairly ravishes his hearers. This is no mere manipulation of keys; it is the soul of the composer speaking through his instrument to the souls of his hearers. It is the spirit of harmony, soothing and tranquilizing the hearts only a moment ago rent by fiery emotions.

Silently they wait while the last note dissolves and fades away

into the air, — while Lander, mutely embracing the young composer, crosses to Elizabeth, and, with a whispered injunction, presses something into her hand. Still silently they watch while Elizabeth, advancing proudly to Herr Jansen's side, pins upon his breast the jeweled decoration, shining from a red, gold-embroidered ribbon, which signifies her lover's triumph.

But as the young musician bends and reverently kisses the trembling fingers that have decorated him, then stands facing the vast audience with the girl's hand locked in his, sympathetic understanding finds vent in such a clamor of applause as brings the entire assembly to its feet.

In an instant the young pair are surrounded; they are seized upon and crowned with flowers and throned on a garlanded divan, while the orchestra, at a signal from Lander, bursts into the Swedish national hymn. Almost they are carried on the shoulders of that surging throng, fired to the verge of frenzy by this culminating scene of a series that has swept the entire gamut of their feelings.

Thus, amid rejoicings and ovations brilliant as those of a royal coronation, Paul and Elizabeth celebrated their twofold triumph; and the contest that had so nearly extinguished the dearest hopes of two lives went out in a blaze of never-to-be-forgotten glory.

The Bramble Gift Trust.

BY ZOLLIE LUTHER JONES.

OW strange that I should have known her two solid months and never heard or seen any signs of this 'peculiarity,' you call it; I should call it a streak of insanity."

"It does seem strange, but you might have known her as many years and never heard of it from her. She never alludes to the subject herself except by the most distant reference, which you could not understand unless you knew the circumstances."

"Well, tell me about her, for I am consumed with curiosity. I thought her remark peculiar when I gave her her choice of the things, and that is what made me ask you about her. You see she had been so kind to us since we moved into the neighborhood. Charlie had the scarlet fever, and we had the rest of the family quarantined from him, and that left so much for me to do, and we couldn't find help, and one day this dear, plump little soul rang the bell with a vigorous snap and offered her help in nursing him at night. She did it with the business air of a professional nurse, and I was so rejoiced to see my way clear that I was about to ask her terms, when she saved me the humiliation by explaining that she was a neighbor with not enough work of her own to keep her quiet, and who had to 'push her nose into other kennels to be happy.' She was an excellent nurse. I felt as if I had been through a training school when she left one morning, saying that Charlie 'would do' if I was careful.

"I looked over my belongings, hoping to find something acceptable to her, and of enough value to express in a measure my great appreciation. I never felt so poor before, and I never felt such a fondness for givable things. Anything nice enough to offer her seemed too precious to part with, and anything I was willing to part with seemed too trifling to give. At last, I put

aside a drawn-work table cover that had never been used; and then, fearing that she was too matter-of-fact to care for such things, I managed to get my consent to venture as a choice to her a lovely Swiss clock, one Rob brought home to me when he went over to the mountains for his health, the year after we were married.

"Well, when she came around in her professional way to ask after her patient, I managed to work up courage to ask her to accept as a gift either the cloth or the clock. I was a little afraid she would be abrupt and say she didn't care for presents; but what *do* you think that woman said? Why, she asked, with a critical air, looking at the works of the clock quite greedily, I thought,— and I have always heard that 'you shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth,'— 'Which is the more valuable?' I could have dropped where I stood. The thought flashed through me, 'The mercenary creature.' And when I looked at her I flushed crimson, for she seemed to see right through me. Then, as I said nothing, she added, 'Which would you rather have after a change of fortune, or in case of the death, say, of any one you love,— which has the most tender memories clinging round it?"

"I was so taken back that I forgot they were presents offered to her, and I told the truth. I said, 'Why the clock, the clock was given to me by Rob, when he got well after we thought he had consumption, and it is the dearest thing, pretty near, that I own.' I was confused and excited and tired with nursing, I suppose, for I felt the tears getting ready, and I began to talk a whole lot of stuff, I hardly knew what, when she patted me on the shoulder and said, quite matter-of-fact, 'I will take the clock; thank you very much. You need rest; go to bed. I will sit with the boy an hour longer.'

"I went to bed, and I spent the whole hour and another trying to decide which of us was crazy.

"Now, for mercy's sake, tell me about this monster growth of eccentricity that you have concealed all this time in your commonplace little Texas town."

"Well," said my friend, "if you are so well acquainted with her, it would be just as well to call, or rather 'drop in,' for we should never get beyond the front parlor if we called formally.

I will tell you something about her as we go, and the rest you may see for yourself."

To this I agreed, and we walked in the direction of Miss Burns's home, my friend explaining as we went:—

"When my father moved to Bramble this Miss Burns was a young lady, and a very attractive one. She led all the young people's church work, and was the moving power in their picnics and socials; the best cook in the cooking club, and the first to sit with the dead and nurse the sick (as she is now, for that matter). She was engaged to an awfully handsome young man, though she wasn't pretty, and I suppose that every girl in town sorter envied her, for they were always wondering 'how on earth Ed Laws ever happened to fancy Nannie Burns.' I guess it was her independence that he liked; handsome men get sick of girls goin' on over them. They were engaged a long time — and long engagements are bad luck every time. Heaven knows how many men would have the same wives they have now if the law compelled them to be engaged a whole twelve months before marriage. Well, theirs fell through. He got dissipated,— he always had been a little so, — and she wouldn't marry him unless he reformed. And he found a girl who would take him, whiskey and all, and so he married Ellen Knowles.

"It went hard with Nannie, but she would have stuck it out as long as life lasted, so it was just as well. The first she knew of Ed's marriage was from the cards, and she got to work and collected all the presents he had given her in all those six years, and she packed them in a middle-sized trunk and got them to him the day before his wedding. They say that every month or so, for several years after their marriage, Ed's wife received packages from Nannie Burns with some forgotten but newly found gift from Ed to her. She sent them to Ellen, for she said it wasn't right to correspond with Ed after he was married to another woman. It was along about that time that she began to put all the things that people had given her in one corner of the parlor on a what-not. After awhile she had to add the center table, and then, a few years ago, she took the whole back parlor for a place to store her gifts. Her idea was that every one, in making a present, runs the risk of wanting that article at some future time, either from

natural covetousness, or from need, or change of circumstance, and that to be really honest one should ever be in the position to return a gift when most needed by the giver. She only kept the things which naturally came her way, at first, but the idea has grown on her lately and now she rather seems to seek them. Only she never uses them, but hoards them jealously. Some of the ladies in town have twenty or thirty articles in her parlor and they rival each other in the richness of their exhibits in Nannie Burns's parlor. They call it the 'Gift Trust.'

"As I said, she never mentions it, but she is delighted to talk about it when some one starts her right."

All of which so worked upon my curiosity that, when finally seated in the front parlor, I could hardly hide my eagerness, as we talked of Charlie's scarlet fever and of church affairs and election. And when at last my friend said casually, "Mrs. Cranburn tells me that she has prevailed upon you to accept her Swiss clock, Miss Nannie, and I should like to show her some of your other gifts," I felt my knees knock together, and I could hardly follow my hostess into the room a few steps away.

"Why, how bare it looks, Miss Nannie!" exclaimed my companion, as she stepped across the threshold. "What is gone?"

Miss Burns, who was now entering the room on the opposite side from that by which we had come in, made a deprecatory gesture, threw herself into the nearest chair, and gasped: "Don't you know? Can't you see? My Tiffany lamp!"

"Oh, the lovely yellow rose shade on the crystal stand! Why, you've had that for years and years! What have you done with it? — given it to some needy connection of 'its,' I'll warrant."

"Ah, yes," said the plump little woman, smiling, "and I had to make them take it. They didn't want to, oh, no, they never do. Poor things! You see," she continued, turning to me, "Mrs. Tucker gave the lamp to me a few months before she died, five years ago. Well, I've been groaning over that Mabel of hers ever since Captain Tucker married again. But there wasn't anything I could do to show my love for her. I had this lamp of her mother's, to be sure, but one doesn't console a step-ridden child with gifts. However, when she ran away yesterday and married, I came right home from the Aid Society, where I heard of it, and

packed that lamp off to her post quick. It'll remind her of her mother, poor girl, but I miss it sadly. I can't bear to come in here, and I always go round and come in at the east door, as I did just now when I left you and met you again. You can't see the empty corner when you come in on the same side with it, you only feel the void. Do you know I can't get the wish out of my mind that I had taken that lovely yellow chair cushion Mrs. Lane offered me when she let me choose between that and the flower stand for my calla-lily? A yellow cushion on that chair would light that corner mightily."

"You might put the table with the lily on it in the corner, and throw that canary scarf over the stand," I suggested, more and more interested. "It would have the same color effect."

"Oh, dear, no; why, woman, the lily would die away from the light. It will bloom next month. Susie Jones gave me that when it was a bulb, and I have taken no end of trouble with it; have gotten up cold nights to wrap it up, or put a lighted lamp near it to keep it from freezing. I'm forcing it now to send to the church when her baby is christened,— three weeks, come next Sunday. No, I'll have to wait. The corner will fill, but it will never have the same character that the lamp gave it; it was from Tiffany's and real 'cut'."

We did not entirely escape the gloom cast by the departed rose shade during our lengthy afternoon call. But we found ourselves able to notice the good points of many of the more prominent articles that overstocked this very peculiar storage room. On one side was a glass-doored case made into the wall. It looked like the shell of some vanished library, whose sedate shelves now held knickknacks of every description under the sun. Pincushions of silk, worsted, patchwork, or embroidery, in shapes which varied from the body of a butterfly to the colossal terror that would have done yeoman service as a foot-stool. Glass, cut and tinted, odd pieces and sets. Inkstands, penwipers, vases, calendars,— it is madness to try an enumeration, for there was every article that is or ever has been popular as a gift, at any season or for any price (in moderation, for we are not wealthy in Bramble), since our native day as a town. On the walls hung paintings and portraits. On a corner bookcase and in every otherwise vacant

place there were books,— all of them gifts, properly labeled on the first fly-leaf from loving friends. In a standing basket I discovered rolls on rolls of hand-made edging, crocheted scallop and insertion in sets, tatting, drawn ruffles,— in fact, anything that could be measured by the yard and rolled in balls.

I love such feminine foolishness, and, picking up an elaborate web of delicate threads, "Why don't you make it up?" I cried effusively. Miss Nannie looked at me reprovingly.

"You don't understand," she said sweetly. "That is my 'Sweet Sixteen' basket. Every young girl of my acquaintance, when she is sixteen years old, makes me a piece of work suitable for a wedding garment, and when she is wedded I return it to her; not until the knot is securely tied, however. My basket suffered greatly this spring; the girls had no conscience about marrying.

"This is solid silver, this set," said she, tenderly handling a tea service. "James Brice gave me this. I helped him out of a scrape; just a small loan I made, nothing to warrant a gift, for he paid me back. But he wouldn't be satisfied until I went with him to Holland's and chose the finest service there. He declares he will never see it again, and I tell him that if he dies without it, I'll get a chance to give it back to his children. And so we have it. He's a jolly fellow, knew him when he cut his second teeth.

"This is Bony Smith's egg collection," said Miss Burns, opening a rudely made cabinet. "He made the case and varnished it himself when he was a half-grown boy. Yes," she laughed, in answer to my inquiring glance, "Lawyer Alexander Bonaparte Smith, of Bramble. He used to climb every tree and ransack every cave and cranny in the whole county for specimens. His mother felt creepy and wouldn't let him keep them in the house, so one day — he was one of my Sunday-school scholars — he took me into his confidence, and I offered him a place in the smoke house for his cabinet. When winter came the first Norther burst some of the eggs, the freshest ones, and after that we kept them in here. We had a bad time with the snake egg, though. I was so afraid it would hatch, for I had heard that snake eggs did not take much heat to hatch them, so for a long time I kept it in a tin can hung in a bucket of cold spring water. Then I risked pouring hot water over it and letting it slowly come to a boil. Since then

I have felt moderately comfortable, especially as it has now been eight or nine years since it was laid.

"You will like this crazy quilt. See if you can find my name. It is on every patch. Isabella Fowler made that, every stitch of it. See, 'Nannie,' 'Annie,' 'Nan,' 'Nancy,' 'N. E. Burns,' it is hidden under some device; and in the corner patches she has hers hidden in the same way. See, 'Bella,' 'Isabella Fowler,' 'Issa,' 'Ella.' Isn't it unique? She was two years making it. I haven't a more elaborate thing in my whole collection.

"This is Mrs. Mills's corner. That woman really afflicts me with gifts. I wonder if she does every one so?" This with charming innocence. "Oh, don't go. I am afraid I have tired you. Do you know I sometimes fear my friends will think me a crank on the subject of my gifts? I am so unfortunately fortunate in receiving them. Do you notice our little Swiss ticking the hours away, Mrs. Cranburn?"

I noticed with a thud of the heart, and for that day, and many after, one thought was always with me, — the thought that that clock was ticking away the measure of time between my present happiness and some great impending sorrow that should bring it back to me.

One day, about a month after Miss Nannie took the clock home, that is, 2,599,595 ticks of the pendulum (counting the extra hours' and minutes' difference over the even month since she began winding it up every day at twelve), the door bell rang furiously. With a throbbing heart — for in spite of my matter-of-fact husband's good-humored jeers, that idea of a sure-to-come calamity still oppressed me — I hurried to the door. There I saw that which sent the entire landscape whirling like mad around me. For at my gate was an express wagon, and on my door-step stood a small darkey, with my Swiss clock in his hand, and a yellow envelope, both from Miss Nancy. When the landscape quieted, I told the boy — rather incoherently — to put the clock down. Then I closed the door on the dreaded object, ran to the telephone, and called up the store — we all have telephones in Bramble, as well as electric lights and water pressure; but our streets are bottomless in rainy weather, and we have as yet no "stock law." I got Rob and put him through an examina-

tion regarding his health, going over his organism carefully in detail; finding him whole, I made him promise to go to the schoolhouse to look into Charlie's condition, although I know *now* that he did not do it at all, but only sat at his desk and laughed at me. Having eased my mind thus far, I sat down to look at the yellow letter, which, I felt sure, foretold some immediate calamity. When at last I found courage to open it, I read: —

"Mrs. R. E. CRANBURN.

"*Dear Madam:* — Having found it necessary to resign the care of yours and other valuable trusts committed to me, I herewith return in good order one Swiss clock. Rec'd Oct. 5, 1893. Please return receipt.

"Respectfully,

"NANCY E. BURNS."

Sure enough there was a receipt blank, made out in good form. A startling ring at the bell took me to the door again, where I found the boy and wagon as I had left them.

"I dasn't go back wifout de receet," said the messenger, with a parting gleam of his white teeth.

Bramble was stirred to its very center. Never since the last boy in gray had found his belated way back to her dreary, war-stricken streets had anything of so much general interest occurred as —

We knew it long before the large square envelopes were delivered by the knowing postmaster. And we knew also, before we saw it in the lower left-hand corner, that there were to be "NO PRESENTS." Miss Nannie was to be married.

An old lover had returned after years of absence. He had left Bramble when the engagement was announced between Miss Nannie and Ed Laws, and had taken it for granted that they were married all these years. Miss Nannie wouldn't hear to marriage at first. She looked upon herself as a widow. But her returned lover used her own principles against her. He told her that he had given her his heart long ago, and that as she could not return it to him in good order, she must give him hers

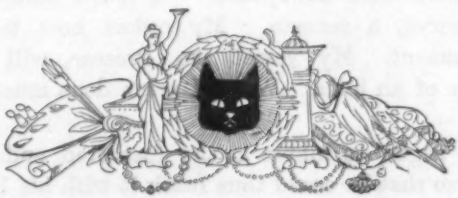
instead. This won her, for every one knows a heart is of no value after ten years of enforced idleness. It was nice, too, I suppose, to be loved "absolutely" after so many years of philanthropic, general affection.

The express boy was busy for a week, and Miss Nannie took lots of things home herself, always insisting on receipts. It was the only way to end the Trust honestly, she said, for she was "going back East to live," and she couldn't risk packing and transportation, although she should miss them. Besides, "he" thought she had better return them all, and clear her mind.

Miss Nannie had kept an account book, and in all those ten years she had never lost or injured one article given her "to keep." She had had plants, glass, lace, silks, kittens, a parrot, and once a baby. She had returned them all in good order when they were needed or wanted.

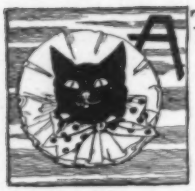
We couldn't give Miss Nannie any gifts when she married, but when her household furniture was auctioned off, it was all gone in three hours, at twice its original value. She sold her furniture because, you see, Hal James is wealthy, and Miss Nannie kept only her heirlooms, which will not burden him.

There was, however, no law against perishable things at the wedding, so we covered the church interior with flowers. The roses and chrysanthemums were glorious that November. The "Sweet Sixteens" were bridesmaids, and we mothers gave a bridal supper that fairly stupefied that New Hampshire man in spite of his money. You see, Miss Nannie, while she never made gifts, was always doing something for somebody, and the whole town loved her. And when Bramble lost her and the Gift Trust, it was as though we had lost a church, hospital, and museum, all rolled into one.



The Parchment Slave.

BY A. M. BARNES.



AT about nine o'clock on the morning of June 9, 1813, a man hurriedly entered the office of Barsdale and Blincup, counselors-at-law, Meeting Lane, Charleston. He was young, tall, and dressed in the uniform of the American army. From both face and manner it was evident that he was in great haste. He asked first for Mr. Barsdale, then for Mr. Blincup. Both were out.

The only other occupant of the room besides the serving boy who had answered the questions, was a man busily writing at a desk near one of the windows. A headless man he seemed at first, so high were his shoulders raised, but a nearer view discovered a crown rather sparsely covered with frowzy hair of a light-brown color.

As he threw back his head on the hurried approach of the intruder, his face showed with a startling pallor; but his eyes were bright and quick, and in an instant he was on his feet.

"Neither Mr. Barsdale nor Mr. Blincup are in," he said in answer to the question, this time put to him; "but Mr. Barsdale will be in the course of an hour or so."

While speaking, the clerk leaned over the desk, and in an absent-minded way added the last three words to a line he had been on the point of completing as the visitor entered.

"That will be entirely too late for my purpose," said the stranger, with considerable annoyance. "I am a soldier,—as you doubtless observe, a seaman. My orders now take me into active engagement. My vessel, the *Decatur*, will sail within three quarters of an hour. What I want done must be done at once."

The clerk began to nibble at the feathered end of his quill. In placing it so that he could thus reach it with his lips, he left a

considerable spot of ink upon his nose; but of this he did not seem to be in the least aware.

"Well," he said, after a moment's reflection, and fixing his restless little eyes upon the visitor, "if your business isn't of a too personal nature, perhaps I can attend to it. I am Ezra Snagforth, at your service; head clerk for Barsdale and Blincup, and their trusted employee for the past ten years and more" — this last very proudly.

"Have you ever drawn up wills?" asked the stranger abruptly.

Snagforth surveyed him with aggrieved face.

"Why, that's one of the main things I do here!" he said.

"Well, then, come! You'll find instructions, in event of application for the Will, here,"— handing Snagforth a sealed envelope. "Start! Don't wait a second. But I forgot, you want the name first. Well, write it as I spell it for you, B-o-i-s-e, Anthony Boise. Whatever you do, don't write it with a y."

Twenty-three minutes later the "Last Will and Testament of Anthony Boise" lay upon the desk of Ezra Snagforth, complete as to its every detail, and the two young men who had been called in by the latter as witnesses had departed; not, however, without a very warm expression of thanks on the part of Mr. Boise.

The latter gentleman, too, seemed on the point of leaving, but paused.

"Excuse me a moment," he said, as though upon second thought. "Let me have another look at the paper, please."

With these words, he reached out his hand for it, and, turning his back, stood for a moment nervously fingering the sheets. At least so Snagforth judged, for he could hear distinctly the crackling of the paper. Then Mr. Boise suddenly wheeled about, and, passing the Will to the clerk,— "You will at once lock it up and keep it safely until called for?" he inquired. "I *must* enjoin this upon you," he continued. "My vessel, as I have said before, goes into immediate action, and a man never knows how such things will turn out," he added, with a little nervous laugh.

"Oh, I hope you'll give the Britishers a good thrashing, and come back to make many more 'Last Wills and Testaments,'" said Snagforth, "but give yourself no uneasiness," he continued; "the establishment of Barsdale and Blincup knows well how to

keep safely such things. It has never betrayed a single trust in all the quarter century of its existence."

Mr. Boise bowed, then turned away, nervously running his fingers in and out of his pockets as though in great excitement.

Snagforth returned to the desk where the Will lay beside the envelope. Of course, he would lock it up safely. But first he wanted to finish the piece of writing on which he had been engaged when Mr. Boise entered. Then he would lock the two up together.

The Will lay on the desk with the last page on top, very much as it had lain when Mr. Boise had picked it up, and when it received the signatures. Evidently, if Mr. Boise had dictated a line or two more there would not have been room on this page to complete the Will. As it was, his signature, a rather bold one, had been placed at the lower right-hand edge of the paper. Opposite, to the left, the two young men, Arthur Holme and Ernest Lord, had written their names as witnesses.

Underneath the Will lay two sheets of blank parchment, such as had been used in its writing. But the parchment seemed to have remained there long enough to have become partly soiled with the passing back and forth of the arm of the worker at the desk. It also presented a rather ragged appearance toward each of its corners. It looked as though some one had torn from it little jagged slips. Perhaps these had been used to wipe the pen.

Snagforth went on writing. He seemed to be rather nervous. Doubtless, it was from the long strain of leaning over the desk. Once in awhile he moved the elbow of his right arm upward and outward with a little jerky movement. If he had touched the pen to paper at such times, he must have left blots, to say nothing of zigzag lines. But it was probable that the pen at such times was off duty. He had a nervous way, too, of moving his lips and in unison the jaw beneath, as though literally chewing a cud other than the one of reflection.

Suddenly Snagforth's fingers went out towards the Will. Possibly it had slipped, and he desired to place it more securely in position.

A loud rap sounded upon the inner door of the office.

Snagforth gave a startled jump, as though the blow had descended upon him instead of the door. Then he became motion-

less, with his right hand poised in air, half way between his head and the desk. As a still louder voice followed the rap, Snagforth began to move his fingers nervously and to make the effort to get steadily upon his feet. He had fully recovered himself, and was standing, his right hand in his upper vest pocket, the other pressed against the desk, when this second visitor entered.

He was a big man, in voice, in body, and — according to his own notion — in position, so no wonder poor Snagforth was awed. But, as his business was decidedly mild, there surely was nothing about the visit, not even the loud rapping, to have caused the clerk to jump in that startled way. Nowadays, however, Snagforth was growing very susceptible to sudden noises.

Ten minutes later, the caller having departed, Snagforth took the document on which he had been engaged, the envelope, and the "Last Will and Testament of Anthony Boise," and locked them safely away within the stone vault.

Two months later, that is, two months to the very day, startling news was spread far and wide through the City: The American vessel, the *Decatur*, Captain Diron, Commander, had met and defeated the British warship, the *Dominica!* It had been a hotly contested engagement, with a grand victory for the American, though a bloody one; for the British captain and all his principal officers had been killed, while the *Decatur*, too, had lost men. Among the killed and wounded were members of some of the most prominent families in the City and surrounding country. First on the list of the dead appeared the name of Anthony Boise! When Snagforth saw it, a little chill ran through him.

"The poor fellow had more than an idea of it, it seems!" he exclaimed. "Well, in the flesh or the spirit, whichever it be, should he walk in at this moment, he would find the 'Last Will and Testament' as he requested, in the *safe*-keeping of Barsdale and Blincup, placed there by their trusted clerk, Ezra Snagforth."

As though to give more assurance to his words, Snagforth walked to the vault, the outer door being already open, and took therefrom a sealed envelope, which had been entrusted to him by Mr. Boise before his departure, and a couple of sheets of parchment folded in a neat, oblong packet. Across the upper edge of the package was written in Snagforth's own painstaking hand: —

"LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

OF

"ANTHONY BOISE, ESQ.

"DRAWN JUNE 9, 1813."

He did not open it. There was no need. He merely laid it back again, fully assured.

It was still the month of August. The blistering day was nearing its close, when a lady dressed in deep black appeared in the office of Barsdale and Blincup. She was frail and delicate looking, still young, with a face more refined than beautiful. She was nervous and evidently excited, and showed plainly that she had been crying.

The serving boy brought her at once to Snagforth.

The little clerk looked sympathetic. He had such a soft heart. A woman in tears always wrenched it to that extent that it was no more than a limp rag in the way of resistance.

"I want to see Mr. Barsdale, if you please," she said huskily. And upon hearing that this gentleman was in, but engaged for the present, she pleaded so eagerly for an immediate interview that Snagforth turned at once toward the inner office. A few minutes later he came back, accompanied by Mr. Barsdale.

"Well, Madam," said that genial gentleman, "what can I do for you?"

She looked up quickly; then as quickly dropped her eyes, while she nervously locked and interlocked her fingers.

"I was the wife and am now the — the widow of Anthony Boise," she said in a faint, trembling voice.

Mr. Barsdale looked perplexed.

"Yes, Madam," he said; "but will you please tell me who — who you — who Anthony Boise was?"

It was the turn now of the woman to look perplexed, and not only perplexed, but absolutely startled. She seemed on the verge, too, of bursting into tears.

"Why, I thought," she begun, "that he — that you — "

Here Snagforth came to the rescue with a reminder that Mr.

Boise was the gentleman whose Will they had drawn up two months ago. "Don't you remember, Major, my telling you all about it? He was killed on the *Decatur*," he added in a low tone.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes, now I do!" exclaimed Mr. Barsdale quickly. And excusing himself for not having recalled the matter, he continued: "And you are the — the widow of Anthony Boise?"

"Yes, once his wife, but now his — his widow," his visitor replied in a voice that she tried in vain to steady.

"And you have come about the Will, I suppose?"

"Yes; he wrote me it was here, in your keeping."

"So it is! so it is! and I presume," he continued after an instant's hesitation, "that you have come prepared to establish that you are the right person to whom the Will is to be delivered? You say your — that is, Mr. Boise wrote you. Have you the letter? Excuse me, Madam," he added apologetically, "we have to be exceedingly cautious about such things."

The face of the woman turned even paler, and she pressed her hand against the desk where she sat, as though for support.

"The letter has been destroyed," she said in a faint voice. "There were other things it contained."

"And you have no written line of other authority from Mr. Boise? No order whatever that I could obey?"

From his tone, Mr. Barsdale was evidently growing disturbed.

Again a reply in the negative from the woman under catechism. She was crying now, and with unmistakable grief, behind her handkerchief.

Mr. Barsdale was touched.

"Well, perhaps we may manage it after all," he said soothingly. "Don't distress yourself so, I beg, Madam. You doubtless have friends in the City who can identify you."

He put this somewhat in the form of an inquiry. She quickly answered him, despite her tears.

"In all the City, there is not one person who knows me; at least," she amended, "not sufficiently to make the identification you desire. My home is in another land."

Mr. Barsdale was evidently startled by this admission. Ere he could reply, he was interrupted by Snagforth, who had just returned from a short journey to another part of the office.

"It seems the lady has some trouble to identify herself," said the little clerk briskly. "That, Major, isn't necessary, according to the understanding. Mr. Boise left instructions in a sealed envelope, which we were to open when application was made for the Will." And being instructed to proceed, Snagforth opened the envelope, drew the folded paper therefrom, read carefully for a few moments, then said: —

"It is all very plain. I am to ask party who appears to claim Will, three questions. If the lady is ready — "

At this the visitor raised her face, still wet with tears, but lighted with the glimmer of a suddenly enkindled hope.

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed, "I remember now! I am ready for the questions."

"By what name is the Person mentioned in the Will called by the Person who made the Will?" asked Snagforth.

The answer came without a moment's hesitation.

"'My beloved wife, Emily.'"

"Where did the Person mentioned in the Will first meet the Person by whom the Will was made?"

Again the reply came as quickly as before, though this time there was a little catch in the voice.

"'Where magnolias bloomed.'"

"And where did they part?"

"'Under the cypress.'"

The catch had grown to a sob now, and again the visitor's face was hidden.

"It is all right, Major. She has passed every test. I am sure you are satisfied now, sir, that the document should be turned over to the lady?"

"Certainly, certainly! Get it, Snagforth."

"And you will give me a written statement," the lady interrupted, "over the signature of your firm, that this is the document excuted by my husband and left with you?"

"That I will, Madam. I had so intended before you asked." Then, as he took the Will which Snagforth handed him, neatly folded and scrupulously indorsed, he continued, "You drew up this document, I believe, Snagforth? You know all the points, and are generally painstaking, so I am sure it is all right."

While speaking, Mr. Barsdale had unfolded the document, though in rather a careless way. He wouldn't wound the feelings of so efficient and so faithful a clerk by seeming too critical. Yet he felt it safer to give it a glance, at least.

"But look here! Man alive! what is this? Why, the paper has no signature, at least not the signature of the one making it! It seems to have had one, though, but it is torn away, and with it a part of the last line of the document."

At the very first words of the second sentence Snagforth had turned suddenly pale, that is, if the pallor of his face could grow one whit more pronounced. By the time Mr. Barsdale had reached his closing words the little clerk was shivering violently. He caught at the desk. He was assuredly going to fall. Then he recovered himself. Suddenly it was as though a flash of light had come, bringing with it a revelation. He steadied himself against the desk and threw his head up.

"It was *he* who did it!" he said quickly. "Yes, I am almost certain of it. It was *he* who did it; yes, it *was!*"

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Mr. Barsdale.

"Of the gentleman himself, of Mr. Boise. It just *couldn't* have been any one else; no, sir, under the circumstances it just *couldn't*. I thought at first, sir, it might have been that—"

All at once he stopped and gazed in a startled manner at Mr. Barsdale. Again he was trembling visibly.

But Mr. Barsdale seemed wholly unconscious of any unusual emotion on the part of his little clerk.

"Explain yourself, Snagforth," he said.

"The Will had been drawn, the signatures attached, and everything finished. The gentleman, that is, Mr. Boise, was on the point of going. But, at the very last moment, he asked me to let him see the paper again. It was lying on the desk just as it had been when the signatures were placed. I reached out for it, and handed it to him. He at once turned his back and began to fumble with the sheets. I heard as plain as plain could be, now I come to think of it, the sound of paper crackling. He must have torn it then!"

"Well, this is a most astounding occurrence!" declared Mr. Barsdale. "The idea of a sane man tearing his signature from a

Will he had been anxious to make, and that, too, within a few moments after making it! If he was anxious to get rid of it, why didn't he tear the whole thing up, and be done with it? Then, too, why give it to us for safe-keeping?"

"Oh, what does it all mean?" cried the poor little woman in black, as she hastily arose and approached Mr. Barsdale. For the last few minutes she had been sitting and gazing helplessly from one to the other. She knew that there was more trouble about the Will, but what as yet she had been unable to understand.

"It means, Madam," said Mr. Barsdale, speaking very slowly and carefully, "that your — that Mr. Boise, after making a will, tore his signature from it; or, at least, so it appears."

"And the Will is thus rendered void?"

She was plainly making a great effort to speak calmly.

"I am afraid so, Madam. Without the signature it is of no earthly good."

"Oh, it cannot be!" she cried, clasping her hands tightly together. "He could not, he would not have done such a thing, especially when he knew how much was at stake!"

"But the evidence is there all the same, my dear lady. We cannot go back of that. Whichever way we look at it, the one fact remains, the signature has been torn from the Will!"

He tried to make his voice as gentle as possible. He was sincerely sorry for her.

"Then we are ruined!" she murmured, with white lips.

"But if you were his wife, Madam, there will be no trouble, when so identified, to claim the widow's part in whatever property he may have left."

"But I cannot prove it. Oh, that is the dreadful part! We were in a terrible shipwreck. We barely escaped with our lives. Clothing, books, papers, letters, the certificate, *all* were lost!"

Then to the lawyer's inquiry if there was no one who could help to establish her claim: —

"There is no one. The clergyman and the one witness are both dead. We shall be penniless, I and my precious little ones!"

"There are children, then?"

"Yes, two; both girls. The younger is only five."

Really touched by the poor woman's plight, the lawyer tried to comfort her by promising to make every effort to clear up this mystery. "Rest assured," he said in parting, "if there is anything that can be done, we will do it. You may call again in two days. Meantime we'll summon the two young men who witnessed the Will."

The lady had taken her departure, the papers about the desk had been straightened and arranged for the morrow, and the little clerk was plodding homeward. He had made what amounted to a positive assertion, but, somehow, now he was not assured. There were some points about the matter too uncertain to be definitely settled in his mind. The more he thought of them, the more unsettled he became, and paler and more nervous, too.

"I will go to see Hedgemoth!" he said, with sudden resolution.

The old bookworm was in his library, the musty volumes piled all around him, his beak-like nose stuck deep into a yellow MS.

"Ah," he said, without looking up, "it's you, is it, Snagforth?"

Then he gave him a searching glance.

"Yes, I see! You are in trouble at last, Snagforth, as I feared, and on account of *It;* isn't it so?"

Instead of replying to the question, Snagforth gave him a recital of what had occurred.

"And what were *you* doing, Snagforth, all the time the gentleman was standing with the Will in his hand?"

"Writing."

"With It close at hand?"

"Yes, with It close at hand; right under my arm."

"Clean and fresh?"

"Clean and fresh."

"Are you sure now, Snagforth, that —"

The little clerk almost jumped from his chair.

"*Don't!*" he cried, trembling with excitement. "Oh, *don't!* It *couldn't* have been! No, no, *no!* I am *sure* of it. I have never failed to detect the ink the very minute —"

"Snagforth," interrupted the old scholar, "hold on a moment. I want you to tell me again everything — now, mind, don't leave out the slightest point — from the time the gentleman laid the Will back on the desk until you locked it up in the safe."

Snagforth obeyed.

"What kind of a rap was that Collins gave? A pretty good thundering one, I am sure, from what I know of him."

"It was indeed a rap that sounded like thunder."

"And made you jump?"

"That it did."

"What were you doing then, Snagforth?"

"Writing."

"Yes, writing, writing, always writing. I might have known that, Snagforth; writing and playing slave to It. O Snagforth, when will you quit? Better tobacco or snuff, many times over; or even the opium pipe occasionally. Heed me, Snagforth; the slave will yet find death at the hands of the master. It is inevitable. No earthly power can prevent it. Hear your old friend, Snagforth, ere it is too late. Something may be done *now*, but later *never!* How strange it is!" he broke off somewhat impulsively, "only once in a world's generation it occurs; yet it *does* occur. And to think it should be *your* fate, Snagforth!"

The little clerk was sobbing like a child.

"Poor fellow!" said Hedgemoth soothingly. "But go home now, Snagforth. I'll do all I can to fathom the mystery."

The next day, as Snagforth was busy at his desk, there were a pair of keen, searching eyes upon him, eyes that watched him from outside a window, but saw all plainly. Not a movement of his escaped them. Once, when Snagforth stopped suddenly at some noise, the thumb and first two fingers of his right hand pressed together and poised in air, there was a smothered exclamation on the part of the watcher.

Hedgemoth, for it was he, now approached the outer door of the office and stood there a few moments, his eyes still intently regarding Snagforth. The upper part of the door was of glass; thus he could easily see into the room.

Suddenly a tremendous rap sounded upon the door. Snagforth almost leaped from his stool; then became motionless, with the fingers of his right hand in air and within a few inches of his head. The next instant the hand fell to the pocket of his vest as though by an unconscious movement, and by the time that he had said "Come in," he had apparently recovered himself.

Hedgemoth advanced.

"Snagforth," he said in a low voice, "run your hand into the upper right-hand pocket of your vest and give me all that you find there."

"It will be nothing," said Snagforth confidently. "I never use that pocket for anything."

"Don't you, though? Well, anyhow, run your hand in, and we'll see."

Snagforth could not refuse so simple a request. He ran his slender, nervous fingers, as yellow as some of the parchment on which he worked, into the pocket of his vest, and drew forth — what?

A half dozen or more loosely rolled pellets of paper, at which he gazed in sincerest astonishment. Then, a moment later, he began to tremble like an aspen.

"Give them to me," said Hedgemoth.

One, two, three, four of the pellets he unrolled; at the fifth one an exclamation escaped him.

"Look!" he said to Snagforth.

Directly before the clerk's eyes there gleamed a slip of yellow, jagged paper, creased and soiled, but plainly marked across with a word or two of writing; and in a clear, bold hand beneath them the name, ANTHONY BOISE!

"My God!" cried Snagforth, and dropped into a chair.

"Cheer up!" said Hedgemoth, "it is so much better than I hoped. It did not get to your mouth, you see. I suspected something of the truth when you so positively asserted that you would have detected the ink."

"That I should!" declared Snagforth. "I have not yet put a piece in my mouth that had the least writing on it that I did not know the fact the moment my tongue touched it. To keep from tearing any other, especially when I am engaged and apt to be absent minded, I keep this here, right under my arm," and he pointed to the mutilated sheets of parchment on the desk.

"This is how it happened, Snagforth. The gentleman laid the Will down. It was right on top of the blank sheets of parchment, or It, as it has always been referred to between us. Your thumb and finger in reaching out made a mistake. They tore the wrong

sheet. You had just rolled the slips between your fingers, and were on the point of carrying It to your mouth when Collins gave his thundering rap. You were startled, so much so as to jump; then you became motionless, transfixed, as it were, in the midst of that which had occupied you the instant before. Seeing the visitor, your first thought was of detection. You felt that you must conceal, at all hazards, that which you had been doing. Involuntarily your hand sought a hiding place. What more convenient than the pocket of your vest? You had done this same thing once or twice before when suddenly startled."

"I am ruined," said Snagforth.

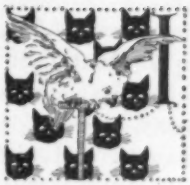
"Not by *this* happening," emphasized Hedgemoth. "You should be thankful it was no worse. Here is the slip intact, save for the creasing and a slight soil. It can easily be fitted to the torn parchment. With your testimony and that of the two young men, all can be made straight for the poor lady."

And so it was; although in confessing his weakness Snagforth expected nothing less than instant dismissal. This punishment, however, he was spared. Barsdale was at first amazed, then indignant; but ere the confession was through, nothing but sorrow for his old, faithful servant filled his breast.

He did not discharge him, he could not; but Snagforth never occupied again the old place of full trust. This seemed almost to break his heart, though he knew it was just. But he did not have much more to bear of this world's joy or sorrow. In six months' time the poor parchment eater had paid the penalty of his slavery, as Hedgemoth had said he would — he was dead. Those who laid him out noticed a strange thing about him — he was exactly the color of parchment!

Monsieur Angot.

BY CHARLES F. BOURKE.



I HAVE a few moments' leisure; I also have a discourse to deliver. This is a piece of unparalleled luck for you people.

I am a parrot. I am a hundred thousand years old last birthday, 17 Thermidor. I count, as you see, by the Gospel of the brave Commune; besides, I find my memory is failing me somewhat.

You must know we are French Emigrants.

I keep secrets. It takes a thousand years of constant practise to learn that much wisdom. My tongue is black, and my eye-winkers are worn off with age. Parrots never die. At least, not unless the act is done on principle, and because of good reasons for committing what my friend Confucius christened hari-kari.

My eyes are goggled; I am an Anarchist; I'm an Oriental Horoscopist. I see visions. I am a liar — sometimes. Liberty forever! Generally, nowadays, on the matter of crackers.

In our house, where it suits me to live, there is an old man. Old for a man, I mean. He's a ridiculous infant to parrots like me. The old man sits by the fire all day, because of bad legs and a weak head. Out of compassion for him I sometimes whistle for dogs. That amuses him. As the dogs obey, it also demonstrates the superiority of mind over matter. Philosophy is my favorite recreation. On each foot I have two toes behind, and two before, to fulfil the law of duality.

There is a woman, too, the old man's daughter. She cooks and sews, and wears weeds, and rubs the old man's legs with things that smell bad. She also makes to me donations of hemp and sunflower seed out of paper bags, when it suits my convenience to eat.

Then there is Susette, the woman's daughter. Her father was a trooper in Davoll's Regiment of Cuirassiers. They made

mince-meat of him at Sedan. I lived with his father, too, — years ago! About the time Princess Lamballe was "dismissed from life" by those brave Communards who murdered women. I lived at a bird fancier's in the Faubourg St. Antoine then, and saw many amusing things: the Abbaye, Chatetet, La Force. They used to take me along to cry "*Vive l'Liberté!*"

Well, all that was a long time ago, and I perceive, as clearly as you, this has nothing to do with Susette. Susette's cuirassier papa being no longer of any use to any one, we came to London, after many adventures, and here, afterwards, came M. Montmorin. This gentleman, whose voice was soft and fawning, and whose estates could not be moved out of Lorraine, became a — what do you call it? A member of the secret police, an employé of Johnnibull, with a cloak over his shifty eyes at night — a government spy. After that, he placed on foot negotiations for the recovery of the estates which could not be moved. Ho, ho! I become garrulous with advancing years. To return to ourselves.

There is the old man and the woman, and that woman's daughter. That does not seem hard to comprehend. The daughter is a worker in lace. There you have it — grandfather, mother, daughter. It is the daughter who is Susette. Now you know all about it, or think you do.

You must know we have become quite English, these years in exile, and celebrate the holidays of the natives. France is so far off. As for me, I am called M'sieur Angot because, having forgotten the Ca Ira and Carmagnole, and the other songs of the Revolution long ago, I afterwards sang the Opera. I have borne many names. French being proscribed, I sing in English.

Susette would say, "Good night, M'sieur Angot," and I would gravely respond, fetching my head from under my wing, to do so, to please her: —

"Rocca bye bêbé
Onna treet op —"

and she would laugh and go upstairs, after tickling my head.

Meanwhile we were very poor, and Montmorin's visits had become fewer and rarer, and circles came around Susette's blue eyes. But what then? When Montmorin secured his estates again (which he would shortly) and married Susette, all would

be well. This in confidence from her to me. But, as I say, the dark circles came, and M. Montmorin came not.

One sharp winter evening the old man was sitting by the fire, as usual, and the woman was getting supper. Susette came in.

You think you know all about girls, you wise fools, hey? You think they are just flesh and blood, and bones, and soft hair, and silk waists, and bits of ribbon, and pinchy shoes. Bah, I have no patience to talk to you. Well, she came in.

I knew she was coming, because I know everything, and I got down from my perch and went to listening at the door, pretending to pick a hole in the wall. It is my game to be secretive.

She had a few little things done up in paper in her arms, and her big eyes were bright, and her little nose was blue with the cold. I knew what was in the papers. The old grandfather and the mother pretended not to see — holiday frauds! Her face was pale and drawn when she kissed the mother and the old grandfather, and she ran quickly upstairs to her own little room. I followed her. Slower, because it suits my convenience to go slow. I have no nerves, and am never in a hurry. Haste is a synonym of subserviency and instability. So I clawed my way upstairs, stopping on every third step to stand on my head and laugh. That is a way I have. It helps the circulation. I learned that trick from a parrot associated with the first Pharaoh. There used to be fine bloody goings-on in those days, and he told me once, in confidence, that he frequently had to drink mummy to harden his heart. He was a Manasseh parrot, with a red and green tail.

When I reached the top stair, I resumed my dignity and walked gravely into her little bedroom. I am the only other one can go in there, I can tell you. She was kneeling on the floor by the side of her little white bed, the packages all strewn upon it, and she was crying. I knew she was going to cry. That's the reason I came up. I am a gentleman, however, and would not intrude upon her grief. I caught hold of the window curtain and walked up to the top, tail first. I have my reasons for doing this also.

I am over a hundred and fifty thousand years old, and you wouldn't understand my reasons if it suited my convenience to tell you — which it doesn't.

She stopped crying, and began murmuring softly to herself.

That was prayer. Ha, ha, ha, ho, ho! Oh, my conscience! This prayer! People only pray back a couple of thousand years now. They prayed back the same number of years then, and the same before that. Your pitiful minds can't grasp time. Takes parrots like me to do that. Or elephants. I respect elephants — they take up room. I am two hundred thousand years old. I saw the Delphic Oracle playing with toys.

When I concluded Susette had been lonesome long enough, I made two hops and got up on her shoulder. This girl lived and cried in Egypt thousands of years ago. I knew her then and liked her, and that is my reason for liking her now. It suits my convenience. There! I didn't mean to tell you, but let it go. You wont understand, anyhow.

She said "Polly, O Polly," like an English girl. Just as she moaned to me once before, in the time when Virgil was sucking a bottle over there on the Mediterranean coast.

I clawed my way down the bosom of her dress, head first. That is a sign of affection. If a parrot does that with you, you are all right. To stand on one's head on the floor is also a sign of affection, mingled with reverence.

She stroked my feathers with her little hand, and I croaked to her comfortingly. Then she dropped her wet face into her hands and said her little prayer — the same one she said (she didn't know it, though) when she was a dancing girl in scanty silks in the court of that flat-nosed Egyptian king, and the courtiers said sly things about her under their breath; only she said "Osiris, O Osiris!" then. Same thing.

After the prayer, she took a letter from her dress and spread it out upon the white counterpane. I looked over her shoulder and read it, too. It was from Montmorin, from Paris: —

"Do not reproach — I cannot receive estates without this marriage — Should we marry — poverty. Accept enclosed money and forget — am compelled, to save my life, even — Good-by."

Oh, the damned liar!

I am naturally phlegmatic, but I don't like to hear women cry — though I ought to be used to it by this time. I have seen them cry two hundred and fifty thousand years, ever since poor Callisto was poked up into the sky to watch the World for all

time, and forbidden to go to bed. She's the one your wise people (pah!) call the Constellation of the Great Bear.

I crawled off the bed, leaving Susette sobbing pitifully.

Say, I know this animal Man and his ways. Don't I, though! He's a cool hand. I knew him before the first Phœnician galley slave was born to toil chained to his oar. I knew him before the twig was sprouted that grew the wood that the galley was built of. I knew him before that galley put out of harbor into the blue waters of the Western Sea to search for Ionic freebooters (they usually found them, to their cost, too). They were black-locked, swarthy, throat-cutting pirates, men after my own heart. I knew him when the only thoroughfare outside of Chaos was the Bifrost Bridge from Mount Olympus in Thessaly to the open gates of Pluto in Avernus, the Milky Way to Jupiter's Palace. Before Religions were. Before Magi, Brahman, or Druid.

Oh, ho! Don't I know him! I was personally acquainted with the Wolf Fenris and the Mitgard Serpent. I have seen the hundred eyes of Argus closed in slumber.

I saw an Egyptian mat seller boiled in oil once for lying to a woman about marriage. It was in an outlying province, where the tribute payers objected to irregularities.

Well, to come back to poor Susette, *I* couldn't help the matter; I stood on my head and croaked quietly: —

> "Rocca bye, rocca bye,
> When the bough bends — rocca bye."

The girl had fallen half asleep, and whimpered a little. After awhile, she got up and walked to the mirror and smoothed her fair hair. Then she called me. "Come on, M'sieur Angot," she said, with a queer little catch in her voice. "It's all over now."

So we went downstairs, the girl and I, and had supper, and she gave the mother a poor little packet of shillings (which is an English coin to trade for food) and they all talked softly about Paris, and Papa Cuirassier feeding the worms over on the Meuse.

I sat upon her shoulder and nipped her ear, meditating deeply. She laughed — a hard laugh, not like Susette at all. They all laughed. But I was reminiscing over old days in Egypt, and felt

sad and lonesome. There was less silent enduring and more spilling of blood in those times. You people don't understand.

I am three hundred thousand years old. I know the hole the Rhone drops into, and the outlet of the Caspian Sea. I will live when the light of the Sun is turned out — when the Earth sinks into the Ocean — when the stars fall from the Heavens — when Time is no more. I am so old that, to me, the Future is the Past.

Now about these things I've been telling you. You think you understood them, but you don't. For they happened long ago; and now the old man and the mother are dead, and I have taken up my residence with a London bird fancier.

One raw, sloppy evening this Spring I was picking up seeds listlessly, and exchanging compliments with a cockatoo in the next cage, but feeling very low spirited, indeed. I am French enough to be influenced by the weather.

Blue-nosed people were passing outside, carrying umbrellas and shivering in the fog. Suddenly a face was pressed against the misted window pane. The face of a woman. A pinched and painted face, with pain-stricken eyes, staring in at me. She was thinly attired in a gaudy, faded silk, and a summer hat of straw rested upon her fair hair, dank with the night mists.

As she peered in, a big policeman came up behind and laid his hand upon her thin shoulder. She never felt his hand. Her eyes were bright with the death fever, and something glistened and ran down her pallid and haggard cheek. The policeman shook her roughly, and the girl looked up. Then she began to cough. Oh, how she coughed! All doubled up and swaying and staggering against the big policeman. Presently she sank slowly to the ground, choking convulsively. Her eyes closed.

The policeman gathered her up in his arms as one might lift a baby, kicked open the shop door, and carried her in.

"Don't litter up my place with that!" cried my master, the bird fancier, confronting him.

"Hold your noise, or I'll break your head!" said the big policeman savagely. He laid the girl upon the long counter. The poor bundle of finery clung to him for a moment. Her arms dropped at last, and she turned her head and looked at me smiling. "M'sieur Angot, M'sieur Angot," she whispered: —

"Rocca bye, roc—ca bye
On — a — tree — top — "

'Tis a small thing to refuse to comfort one who is dying, so I spat out the seed I was chewing, and took up the song, just for the sake of old times —

"When the bough — break
The cradle will fall—
Down — Down — Rocca bye — Eh? "

Her eyes were glazing, and she looked at me with a vacant stare. As I thought 'how changed she was, a slow, sweet smile crept over her lips, and she laid her little head back upon the policeman's arm, nestling it as one about to go to sleep. She whispered in the old girl voice: —

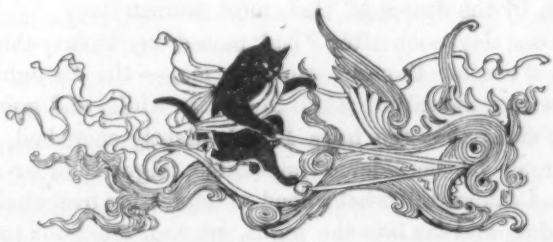
"Good night — M'sieur Angot — "

. . . . . .

A short time after, a long-faced man came with others of his kind and put Susette into a deal box.

As they were screwing the lid down, the big policeman came in and began to blubber, trying to cover it by coughing. My master watched him, and grinned. The big policeman waited until the long-faced men had carried out the box. Then, there being nobody else but those two in the shop, he walked up to my master and smote him upon the nose so that he fell down and squealed like a pig. Then the big policeman left the shop also.

All these curious things being over, I resumed my interrupted conversation with the cockatoo.



The Ivory Bells.

BY JAMES BUCKHAM.

MY name is Imogen Diller, and I am twenty-five years old. The reader will, perhaps, understand more readily from this statement the confession I am about to make. Being a woman, I am naturally a believer in dreams. I think I never knew a woman who was entirely free from this mild form of superstition. And being comparatively young, — as life is estimated nowadays, — I am romantic.

I was twenty-two when my heart first began to hunger for sympathy, for appreciation, for affection. How natural, how inevitable, is this period in a girl's life history! It is a condition as normal as the unfolding of a bud. And equally natural, I think, are her little innocent instinctive girlish devices for rendering herself beautiful in dress and manner, her love for going into company — there to meet the rank and file of those from whom must be recruited her possible prince. She shines in looks, in thoughts, in words, in actions, with the glow of that hardly acknowledged desire within her breast — the desire for the true, manly love which she feels that she can so opulently repay.

If the world only knew! It laughs at girls who are dying for unattained love. It would weep could it see into their hearts. So terrible is it to feel youth slipping away, and with it that hope for which, by the decree of God, most women live.

It was one day, soon after I had passed my twenty-third birthday, that a terrible thought came to me, — the thought that I should be over the hill of youth in a little while, and going down the other side; that the hope I had silently cherished, which I had never as yet considered impossible, might soon be a lessening one. I cannot tell what a flood of depression overwhelmed me. All that day, and far into the night, my soul cried out to God for the precious gift without which my life would mean nothing.

Among my dreams that night, when at last I slept, there was one that visited me twice, and seemed to be, in a vague way, an answer to my passionate prayer. I saw myself standing on a bare hillside, whose slope was black with shadow. In the midst of the gloom I raised my hands, and something white came floating down out of the clouds. It looked like a wreath of snowy flowers; but as it drifted slowly down, and settled in my outstretched hands, I saw that it was a necklace of little white bells. I put the bells about my neck, and instantly a glorious burst of sunlight illumined the hill, and I awoke. Twice, I say, this dream came to me, once in the middle of the night, and once just before waking in the morning. As I opened my eyes in the real sunlight, the dream seemed so actual and so vivid, that I clutched my bosom, thinking to catch the bells before they melted away.

As I considered the vision, I said to myself, "There is a hint in this dream worth heeding. Hitherto I have neglected personal adornment, thinking that Love must indeed be blind, if he cannot see beyond the surface glitter of that which is foreign even to the physical person. But it may be that Love is not blind, only wandering of sight. Does, perhaps, something crude, glittering, conspicuous, catch his eye, and draw it whither it may discover the better thing that lies behind? I will see!"

Every girl knows perfectly well the kind and amount of her own personal attraction. I knew what people called me — what I was: "Not exactly pretty, but stately, impressive; a matronly girl, of the Dutch madonna type." Such a type is not generally winsome. It is too quiet. Men will jostle a madonna who stands between them and a *coryphée*. Yet, if the madonna could only fascinate and attract them at first sight, as the *coryphée* does, how much more they would admire and love her! It is all a question of initial fascination.

With some such idea eddying through my mind, I went to a famous firm of manufacturing jewelers, and gave them a novel commission — to make me a necklace of ivory bells. I bade them spare no expense; to make the ornament the most exquisite thing that art could devise; no material to be used but the finest, most transparent ivory; the bells to be perfect and complete in every detail, even to the tiny, vibrant tongues; and all united by a

chain of polished ivory links. "Even if the dream prove in no sense prophetic," I thought, "it has given me the idea of an absolutely unique ornament. I shall not be unnoticed when I wear it."

Two thousand dollars was the cost of my necklace. I am not wealthy, but I am by no means poor. I could pay the money, and I did.

Immediately a new experience came into my life. I became a center of admiration! Hitherto, with other quiet, inconspicuous girls, I had been comparatively unnoticed in company. But from the first occasion when I appeared wearing my necklace of ivory bells, I was ringed about with admirers. And the most intoxicating part of it was that I really could not determine whether the ivory bells were the sole attraction, or whether they had called out and emphasized some actual personal charm that made *me* admirable. I do not remember that a word was ever said to me in society about the ornament; society is too conventionally polite for that. But I wondered, especially when the men thronged about me, whether they were looking at the exquisite workmanship of the bells, or at the girl who wore them.

It was during this brief season of social triumph that a revelation came to me, which accounted, in large part, for my disquietude of a year past. The prince had come! Indeed, he had been near me for a long time, and I had not known that I loved him.

He was a silent man, a poet — some called him a dreamer. He went into society, not for pleasure's sake, but that he might study human nature; for the same reason that he went into the lumber camps of the North, and the slums of the great cities.

The first time he came to me, at the dull tinkle of the ivory bells, I felt an almost overpowering desire to stretch out my strong young arms and sweep from before me all the simpering circle on whose outskirts he stood. Then, for an instant,— and the only time I can remember, until the strange thing happened, — he looked into my eyes, and I became as a child before him. Afterwards, as often as he came near me, such a rapturous thrill ran through all my being that I could scarcely keep from crying out.

Yet he alone, of all the hovering circle, seemed most interested, not in me, but in the ivory bells. I continually caught him studying them; and the thought maddened me, that he, whose love meant all the world to me, admired only the ornament upon my neck.

One summer evening there was a grand ball given at an out-of-town villa. He and I were there, with a great company of the gayest of the city's gay. As usual, I wore my ivory bells, and, as usual, those who admired them, or me,— I could not tell which,— gathered around me. As the stifling night wore on, and dance followed dance, I grew faint and weary, and felt as if I must have a breath of heaven's pure air. As I moved toward the wide-open French windows, from which one could step upon the veranda, the Poet crossed my path. He stopped and I saw that his eyes were fixed upon the ivory bells. Much as I loved him, I could almost have smitten him then! He spoke: —

"Are you going out for a breath of fresh air, Mademoiselle Diller? So was I. May I have the honor of accompanying you?"

The *honor!* My soul surged within me. I was about to return some stereotyped refusal, when the thought came to me: "Is not this the hour of fate? Yes! I will prove to myself, this night, that it is the ivory bells alone he cares for."

So I put my hand upon his arm, and together we went out into the night. Oh, that beautiful, soft night! Could a thousand years blot out its memory? The stars twinkling so purely in the blue-black sky; the restful sighing of the trees; the patter of a fountain near by; the music floating out across the shrubbery.

"Let us go down by the lake," my companion said; "there we may rest and enjoy the coolness."

Down the terraces we went, arm in arm. There was a trembling between us. I could not tell whether my hand wavered upon his arm, or his arm shook under my hand. But when we reached the little artificial lake, I sank upon a bench, and he, standing a little aside, stood before me. Some gaudy lanterns, not far away, cast a faint glow over us.

The silence grew oppressive. I felt his eyes upon the ivory bells. Suddenly my spirit rose to the level of its purpose. I

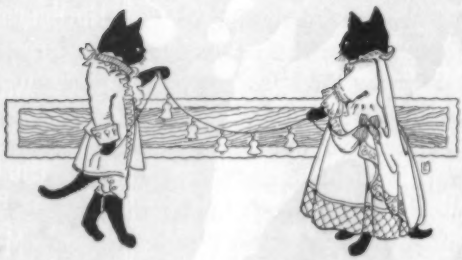
started up, withdrawing a little, and snatched the glistening circlet from my neck. The next instant it was flashing in the crystal water of the lake, sinking so slowly that it seemed to hang suspended in the tide, like the golden goblet that the poet saw from the bridge at midnight.

Then I looked at my Poet, and all of life trembled upon that instant. O gracious heaven! His eyes were fixed, not upon the sinking bauble, but upon my face. Love had passed the crucial test.

At that supreme moment something like rushing darkness came over me, something with roaring wings, as of a great bird. I fainted from the awful stress; but even as I sank, I felt my lover's arms encircle me.

I have confessed. For me the world is made new, and all things in it.

My Poet smiles, as I read him what I have written about the ivory bells. He declares that he never saw them in his life until they flashed from my hand, that night, into the lake. If he seemed to look upon them, he swears it was because he dared not lift his eyes to the soul that burned in mine. The light had slain him, except it had been of love.



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